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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 000110

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2017

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SUBJECT: CONSTITUTION ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT FORESEES FAST
PROGRESS

REF: BANGKOK 56 (CDA FORMED)

Classified By: Political Officer David R. Greenberg, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) Thailand's Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) convened for the first time on January 8. This meeting marked the beginning of a 180-day time frame provided by the interim constitution. The CDA thus has until July 7 to complete "drafting and consideration" of a new constitution. The government must organize a referendum for approval of the new charter between 15 and 30 days after the completion of the CDA's work.

12. (U) At its January 8 meeting, the CDA unanimously selected Thammasat University Associate Professor Noranit Setabutr as its President. In January 6 public comments, Noranit gave reason for optimism when he said the CDA's work should require no more than four months, rather than the full 180 days. He also said the new constitution "will be modeled on the 1997 Constitution." (Thais generally view the 1997 document as the Kingdom's most democratic and legitimate constitution.) The two men selected as his Vice Presidents, Seree Suwannapanon and Decho Sawananont, both served on the Assembly which prepared the 1997 charter.

13. (C) Biographic information: Noranit graduated from the Political Science faculty of Thammasat University in 1963 with a BA in Diplomacy. In 1965, he received a diploma in Sovietology from Freiburg University in Switzerland; he subsequently received Master's Degrees from Occidental College (1970) and Columbia University (1975). He has an honorary Doctorate of Philosophy from Royal Roads University (Canada). Noranit has held various positions at Thammasat University from 1976 until the present, including as Rector (1991-1994 and 1995-1998). He served briefly as a Senator in 1992 and was a member of the Poll Watch Committee for the 1992 general election. Until late 2006, Noranit served as Secretary General of the prestigious King Prajadhipok's

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Institute. Noranit is a good contact of the Embassy, has participated in Embassy programs, and currently serves as President of the Columbia University Association in Thailand.
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